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ABSTRACT

A determination as to whether more positive attitudes toward reading could be developed in elementary school children who, because of economic and cultural factors, had limited experience with books was sought in this study. Children from nonreading backgrounds were selected to take part in a books exposure program which supplemented the school's basic reading program. There were three experimental and three control classrooms at each grade level from 1 through 5. Each week teams of three volunteers visited the experimental classrooms to work with small groups of 10 or less children. They tried to arouse and strengthen the children's interest in books. No volunteers worked with the control groups, but each of those classrooms contained a set of books which the children were allowed to take home. An attitude instrument was designed to measure the children's attitudes toward reading at home and at school, visiting the library, and buying books and receiving books as gifts. The program positively affected the attitudes of those children exposed to the experimental situation. Tables are included. (NH)

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A STUDY IN MOTIVATING CHILDREN TO READ

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A Study in Motivating Children to Read

The purpose of this study was to determine whether more positive attitudes towards reading could be developed in elementary school children who, because of economic and cultural factors, had limited experience with books. The children selected for our study live in the economically depressed "Flint" area of Fall River, Massachusetts. Compared with all other elementary school students in Fall River, children living in this particular area had generally low achievement scores and limited access to books. Percentages of fourth-grade students scoring below the city norm in reading in the schools in the "Flint" area are shown in Table 1.1.

We believed that the substandard reading achievement of these students was partially caused and probably aggravated by the absence or unsuitability of reading materials in their homes. Therefore we conducted a survey to ascertain the quality and quantity of newspapers, magazines, and children's books in the homes of 165 children in the third, fourth, and fifth grades. Children were interviewed instead of their parents on the assumption that they would be less inclined to give socially acceptable answers. Also, the children would report only the materials of which they were aware, and presumably only those that could potentially influence or had already influenced them. We interviewed each child separately. The results of the survey (Table 1.2) supported our assumptions. There were no children's books in 48 per cent of the homes. The reading difficulty level of the book titles

Table 1.1

Fourth-Grade Pupils Scoring Below City Norm
in Reading Comprehension*

(City Norm = 4.5)

School	Percentage
Small	43%
Davol	48%
Aldrich	53%
Coughlin	58%
Dubuque	61%
Watson	79%

*California Achievement Test, 1966

Table 1.2

Percentage of Newspapers, Magazines, and Children's Books in the Homes of 165 Children in the Experimental Group as Reported by the Children

Media	Yes	No
Daily Newspapers	83%	17%
Sunday Newspapers	44%	56%
Magazines	44%	56%
Children's Books	52%	48%

reported revealed that these children could not read these books even if they were motivated to do so. The types of magazines the children reported, indicated their parents' non-literary interests and preference for pictorial representation of events (Table 1.3).

We also found that few children had library cards, perhaps, because their desire to read had not been sufficiently stimulated, and because the children's library in Fall River is quite distant from the "Flint" area. The round trip bus fare to the library is 50 cents, which is more than the average cost of a paperback book at school discount prices. It would seem, therefore, that if their economic circumstances permitted, the children could buy books more easily than borrow them.

We began the study with the following question in mind: Would stimulating experiences with books and availability of books in the home contribute significantly to the way children viewed reading and owning books? We selected at random 15 experimental and 15 control classrooms from within the same schools in the "Flint" area. At each grade level from one to five, there were three experimental and three control classrooms. An analysis of reading achievement scores revealed no significant differences between the two groups in reading comprehension and vocabulary at the outset of the study. Therefore any differences in attitude that might occur in the future, would reflect the results of their experiences rather than their differences in reading ability initially.

The Experimental Groups. Each week teams of three volunteers visited the experimental classrooms. The volunteers worked with the same groups of no more than ten children, throughout the school year. They were

Table 1.3

Magazines in the Homes of 165 Children in the Experimental Group, as Reported by the Children

Title	Number of Homes*
General Interest	
Life	20
Look	10
Saturday Evening Post	4
Newsweek	2
Time	1
Forbes	1
Romance and Movies	
True	7
Movie	3
Screen Digest	3
Modern Romance	2
Love	1
Parade	1
Women's Magazines	
McCalls	4
Parents	4
Family Circle	3
Ladies Home Journal	3
Redbook	2
Women's Day	2
Better Homes and Gardens	1
Sports	
Sports Illustrated	5
Football and Baseball	1
American Rifle Club	1
Hunting	1
Children's	
American Girl	2
Humpty Dumpty	1
Children's Digest	1

*There was more than one magazine in some homes.

able to give each child more attention than the classroom teacher, who had thirty or thirty-five students in the class. Depending upon the children's age, the meetings lasted from thirty-five minutes to an hour. During this time, the volunteers tried to arouse and strengthen the children's interest in the books they presented. Using their own inventiveness, or adopting suggestions from the Volunteer Handbook, the volunteers planned lively meetings. They encouraged the children to take home and read books purely for pleasure, at the same time leaving the children free to decide whether they wished to do so. They also took the children on field trips to the Children's Library.

Inspired by stories they listened to and read, children acted out scenes and characters, wrote short poems and stories, played word games, made costumes, and produced short, original plays, which were taped and filmed for them and other classmates to enjoy. Stories, poems, and illustrations were compiled into booklets, photocopied, and given to each contributor. Throughout the year, each child was permitted to choose four gift books from a wide selection. This feature of the program enabled the child to have more books available at home as well as to give him the feeling that a book is a special personal possession. All of these activities were part of the specially designed Books Exposure Program.

The Control Groups. Each control classroom contained a set of books, containing one copy of each book on the basic booklist for that particular grade level. Students were allowed to take these books home for a period of one or two weeks. Volunteers did not work with these

children, and no gift books were offered. Therefore, should significant differences in attitudes occur between the experimental and control groups, the results could be attributed to the influence of the volunteers, the enjoyment of participating in the Program, and the gift books. What we hoped to determine was whether the availability of books is as influential in developing more positive attitudes towards reading as surrounding children with stimulating adults who encourage them to read, provide stimulating experiences related to the stories they have read, share their excitement about books, and give them books of their own to keep.

Design of the Attitude Instrument. Because suitable instruments to measure reading attitudes were not available commercially, it was necessary to construct an instrument. We considered adapting and attitude instrument designed for use with teenage children, but found it inappropriate for younger children, since it included values and concepts beyond their experience and understanding. Another problem in measuring attitudes is the questionable accuracy when respondents give answers that do not reflect their true feelings. Attitude inventories that require "yes" and "no" answers permit hostile or docile children to answer according to whether they wish to please or alienate the examiner. Other problems in measuring attitudes frequently arise in obtaining validity, internal consistency, and score stability.

In order to deal more effectively with these problems in constructing our instrument, we used the pair comparison method. By pairing each item with every other item and repeating a few of the items

in reverse order, we were able to have a measure of internal consistency. Another advantage of this technique is its simplicity; children need to consider only two alternatives simultaneously.

To determine alternatives appropriate to our sample, we devised a preliminary questionnaire that was administered individually to 210 children. Children were asked about preferred activities at home, presents they would like to receive, and things they would buy if they had two or three dollars to spend. Answers given most frequently were selected as alternatives. Using these choices, we constructed two forms of the instrument, a pictorial form* for grades one and two, and a written form for grades three, four, and five.

To test for reliability, we used the instrument with groups of children in grades one through five who were similar in background to the children in our sample. A two-week period elapsed between initial testing and retesting. The results showed that score consistency increased with age. But, despite changes in score consistency from grade to grade, the group means of each question with few exceptions did not vary appreciably at any grade level from initial testing to retesting (Table 1.4).

Results: Differences between Control and Experimental Groups in Reading Attitudes. The attitude instrument was administered to the experimental and control groups at the end of the school year. Statistically significant differences between the reading attitudes of the two groups occurred at all grade levels on one or more questions (Table 1.5).

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*Robert McCloskey, children's book author-illustrator, created and donated illustrations for the pictorial form.

Table 1.4

Mean Attitude Scores on Test and Retest
by Grade Level

Question		Grade Level 1 (N= 56)	2 (N= 56)	3 (N= 57)	4 (N= 51)	5 (N= 62)
1. Reading at home	Test	1.70	1.79	1.67	2.25	2.06
	Retest	1.71	2.32	1.61	2.27	2.34
2. Visiting the Library	Test	2.29	2.29	2.11	3.39	2.32
	Retest	2.09	2.45	2.44	3.35	2.47
3. Reading in School	Test	2.20	2.34	2.11	2.51	2.18
	Retest	2.07	2.57	2.47	2.41	2.24
4. Receiving Books as Presents	Test	1.57	1.71	2.68	2.80	2.69
	Retest	1.57	1.96	2.39	3.08	3.18
5. Buying Books	Test			2.98	3.96	3.66
	Retest			3.07	3.51	4.06

Table 7.5

Means and Standard Deviations of Experimental and Control Groups by Grade Level on the Reading Attitude Test

Question	Grade	Maximum Score Possible	Experimental N	Experimental Mean	Experimental S.D.	Control N	Control Mean	Control S.D.
1. Reading at Home	1	5.00	64	2.09	1.09	81	1.81	1.12
	2	5.00	59	1.76	1.01	75	2.55**	1.71
	3	5.00	79	2.51*	1.52	83	1.99	1.56
	4	5.00	76	3.38*	1.38	89	2.89	1.49
	5	5.00	77	3.12	1.57	84	2.68	1.61
2. Visiting the Library	1	6.00	64	2.93**	1.33	81	2.29	1.30
	2	6.00	59	2.37	1.39	75	2.62	1.49
	3	6.00	79	3.41*	1.70	83	2.86	1.78
	4	6.00	76	3.43*	1.87	89	2.81	1.73
	5	6.00	77	2.97	2.03	84	2.62	1.86
3. Reading in School	1	5.00	64	2.51*	1.25	81	2.00	1.23
	2	5.00	59	2.53	1.33	75	2.48	1.36
	3	5.00	79	2.72	1.23	83	2.48	1.36
	4	5.00	76	3.05	1.49	89	2.74	1.35
	5	5.00	77	2.45	1.50	84	2.67	1.28
4. Books as Presents	1	4.00	64	1.66	.93	81	1.40	1.06
	2	4.00	59	1.59	1.09	75	2.78**	1.48
	3	6.00	79	3.01	1.57	83	2.78	1.48
	4	6.00	76	3.79*	1.59	89	3.19	1.76
	5	6.00	77	3.64**	1.87	84	2.69	1.81
5. Buying Books	3	7.00	79	3.96	1.56	83	3.54	1.87
	4	7.00	76	4.89	1.77	89	4.38	1.83
	5	7.00	77	4.04	2.34	84	3.87	1.94

(*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$)

From such alternatives as "watch TV," "play with toys," and "color and paint," the experimental group children in grades three and four chose to "read a book" on a rainy Saturday or Sunday to a significantly greater degree ($p < .05$) than control group children. Similar results were obtained on the question of places to visit. From several attractive alternatives (movie, circus, aquarium, etc.) the experimental groups in grades one, three, and four, chose to visit the library ($p < .05$) more than the control groups. The Program's effects were also evident in the children's attitudes toward receiving books as presents; experimental group children in grades four and five preferred a book to such items as a game, a toy, a record, and candy statistically significantly more than the control group children. The three upper grades were asked an additional question: If you had one or two dollars to spend, what would you buy? Crayons and coloring book, clothes, and a record were among the alternatives given. There were no statistically significant differences between groups, but the experimental group was more favorably inclined toward buying a book.

On the question of reading in school, the experimental group children showed more positive attitudes than the control group children, although the differences were statistically significant at the first grade level only. These results suggest that the experimental group children seemed to transfer their more positive attitudes toward reading for pleasure at home to reading in school.

The major exception to the trend of the experimental groups to express more positive attitudes occurred at the second grade level. On two questions, preferred rainy day activities and presents, the

statistically significant difference was in favor of the control group. This result was not surprising. An exceptionally enthusiastic and dynamic second-grade control group teacher used the Program books as part of her own curriculum. All of the Program books in this classroom had been signed out; some of the more popular ones had been taken home by practically every student. Throughout the year, the children gave book reports, wrote book reports, composed and illustrated original stories. Because of their enjoyable reading experiences everyday, this control group had more exposure to stimulating experiences with books than the second-grade experimental group.

After observing this teacher and her students, we realized that this classroom could not be considered a classic control group. We were pleased with the classroom activities, and preferred not to impose strict controls, because these children had so much to gain from their teacher. Instead, in the interest of scientific rigor, we selected two other second-grade control classrooms, similar in background, to whom we administered the attitude test. Analysis of our new data showed no statistically significant differences between second-grade experimental and control groups on any of the four questions. Of greatest interest here, however, is the impact that can be made by an enthusiastic teacher who is permitted and encouraged to use books that appeal to children as a part of her daily language arts curriculum.

Order of Preferences Among Alternatives. Although statistically significant differences were obtained between experimental and control groups on attitudes toward reading at home, reading in school, visiting

the library, and owning books, we wanted to know where these choices ranked among other attractive alternatives. We realized that although significant differences existed between groups, both groups might prefer reading less than most other activities. Order of preference for reading would obviously influence the interpretation of our results. For these reasons, we tabulated the frequency of selections for each alternative. Then each choice was ranked in order of perference (Table 1.6-1.10).

Rainy Day Activities. The first question on the attitude instrument asked the children how they would spend their time at home on a rainy Saturday or Sunday when they could not go outside to play. The alternatives included "watch TV," "read a book," "listen to records," "play games," "color or draw," and "play with toys." The order of preferences for each grade level is shown in Table 1.6. "Listen to records" was the most preferred activity for all grades except the experimental fourth and fifth grades, whose most perferred activity was "read a book." The least preferred activity at all grade levels was "play with toys." "Read a book" was a more preferred activity at the upper grade levels than at the lower grade levels. This difference may be attributed to the younger children's inability to read well independently. But, as we have pointed out previously, third and fourth-grade experimental group children preferred reading at home, and fourth and fifth-grade experimental groups chose books as presents to a statistically significantly greater degree than the control group children. Thus, the differences in the degree of preference at the upper grade levels

Question: Below are some things you could do on a rainy Saturday or Sunday. Place a mark (X) beside the one you like the most in each pair.

Table 1.6

Order of Preference Among Alternatives

Alternatives	Grade Level 1		2		3		4		5	
	Exper. (N= 65)	Control (N= 83)	Exper. (N= 59)	Control (N= 75)	Exper. (N= 79)	Control (N= 83)	Exper. (N= 76)	Control (N= 89)	Exper. (N= 77)	Control (N= 84)
Watch TV	4	4	3	5	2.5	3.5	3.5	4.5	4	3
Read a good book	5	6	5	3.5	4	5.5	1	2	1	4
Listen to records	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1
Play games	2	3	4	3.5	2.5	2	3.5	3	3	2
Color or draw	3	2	2	2	5	3.5	5	4.5	5	5
Play with toys	6	5	6	6	6	5.5	6	6	6	6

between experimental and control groups, and in the order of preference between upper and lower grade levels suggest that the desire to read is a function of both ability to read and interest in reading.

Places to Visit. We were interested in knowing whether exposure to a variety of interesting books and field trips to the library, a part of the Books Exposure Program for the experimental groups, had increased the children's desire to visit the library. The second question on the attitude instrument asked the children to choose places they might like to visit. The alternatives were library, circus, ball game, movies, aquarium, famous old house. For grade levels three, four, and five, two additional alternatives, art museum and science museum, were given. The order of preferences for all grade levels is shown in Table 1.7. At grade levels one and two, the most preferred place to visit was the circus, with library ranked in second and third places. At the third-grade level, library and circus shared the first position. In grades four and five, only the experimental groups preferred to visit the library as a first or second choice; for the control groups, the library was among the least preferred places to visit.

The greatest disparity between experimental and control groups in choosing to visit the library occurs at grade levels four and five, but the trend begins at the third grade level. The desire for children in these three grades to visit the library may result from their interest in reading books at home and, consequently, a greater desire to borrow books.

Question: Below are a number of places where you might like to visit. Make one choice (X) for each pair.

Table 1.7

Order of Preference Among Alternatives

Alternatives	Grade Level 1		2		3		4		5	
	Exper. (N= 65)	Control (N= 83)	Exper. (N= 59)	Control (N= 75)	Exper. (N= 79)	Control (N= 83)	Exper. (N= 76)	Control (N= 89)	Exper. (N= 77)	Control (N= 84)
Library	2	3	3	2	1.5	3.5	2	5	1	7
Circus	1	1	1	1	1.5	2	4	3	4	5
Baseball game	4	5	2	5	3	6	6	8	5	3
Movies	3	2	4	4	6	5	8	7	7	6
Aquarium	5	6	5.5	3	5	3.5	7	6	8	4
Famous old house	6	4	5.5	6	8	8	3	1	3	2
Art museum					7	7	5	4	6	8
Science museum					4	1	1	2	2	1

Activities in School. The third question on the attitude instrument was included to measure the children's attitudes toward reading in school; we hoped also to be able to relate these attitudes to their attitudes towards reading at home for pleasure. The alternatives (Table 1.8) given the children were typical school subjects: art, arithmetic, writing, spelling, music, and reading. Children at grade levels one and two generally chose music first; experimental group children at the upper grade levels selected reading first. Again, the differences between the upper and lower grades in preference for reading can probably be accounted for by the superior reading ability of the older students. The outstanding result is that experimental group children in grades three, four, and five selected reading as their most preferred school subject.

Presents You Would Like. Because so few children participating in the Books Exposure Program had books at home, one of the Program's activities was to offer each child his choice of four gift books a year. We hoped to be able to increase children's interest in owning books. To test for differences, we included a question about presents they would like to receive. Six alternatives were given to grades one and two; two more alternatives were included for the upper grades. The order of gift preferences is shown in Table 1.9.

At grade levels one and two, crayons and coloring book, candy, and clothes were among the first and second choices. Books were among the least preferred presents. At the upper grade levels, clothes and records were the most preferred. Fourth and fifth-grade children preferred books as presents more than children in the lower grades and

Question: Here are some things you might do in school. Put a check mark (X) beside the one you prefer to do in each pair.

Table 1.8

Order of Preference Among Alternatives

Alternatives	Grade Level 1		2		3		4		5	
	Exper. (N= 65)	Control (N= 83)	Exper. (N= 59)	Control (N= 75)	Exper. (N= 79)	Control (N= 83)	Exper. (N= 76)	Control (N= 89)	Exner. (N= 77)	Control (N= 84)
Drawing, coloring	6	4	3	2.5	4	1	3	1	4	2
Arithmetic	5	5	5	1	5	5	4	4	5	6
Writing	2	3	4	4.5	6	6	5	6	6	5
Spelling	3	2	6	6	2	3.5	2	3	2.5	3
Music	1	1	1	4.5	3	3.5	6	5	2.5	1
Reading	4	6	2	2.5	1	2	1	2	1	4

Question: Which of the following presents would you like the most? Make one choice (X) for each pair.

Table 1.9

Order of Preference Among Alternatives

Alternatives	Grade Level 1		2		3		4		5	
	Exper. (N= 65)	Control (N= 83)	Exper. (N= 59)	Control (N= 75)	Exper. (N= 79)	Control (N= 83)	Exper. (N= 76)	Control (N= 89)	Exper. (N= 77)	Control (N= 84)
Games	5	5	3	3	1	3	4	3	4	3
Clothes	3	3	1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1
Candy	2	2	5	4	7	7	8	7	5	5
Crayons and coloring book	1	1	2	2	4	4	5	5	6	7
Toy	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	8	8	8
Book	4	6	4	5	5	5	3	4	1	6
Record					3	1	1	2	3	1
Ship model or doll's dress					8	8	7	6	7	4

the fifth grade experimental group selected books as their first choice.

Things You Would Buy. A question on things children would like to buy if they had two or three dollars to spend was added to the attitude instrument for the upper elementary grades. We expected to find a high degree of correspondence between things children preferred as gifts and things they preferred to buy. For the most part this expectation was supported by our data (Table 1.10). The upper grades again selected clothes and records as the items they would like to own. Their least preferred purchases were candy, coloring book and crayons, and toys. The children seemed to prefer buying a book somewhat more than receiving one as a present. The experimental groups favored buying a book more than the control groups.

Summary. The Books Exposure Program was used to supplement the basic reading program offered in the school, as those homes that can and do encourage reading supplement it. In this way, the Program relieved some of the burden placed upon the educational system by children from non-reading backgrounds, who need not only instruction in basic reading skills, but also pleasurable experiences that encourage them to enjoy and value reading. Although the Program took place during school time, the major emphasis of the Program was on reading at home rather than at school, on enjoyment rather than achievement, on stimulating curiosity about books, and fostering exploration of many kinds of books.

Question: If you had two or three dollars to spend, which of the following things would you buy? Place a mark (X) beside the one you would buy in each pair.

Table 1.10

Order of Preference Among Alternatives

Alternatives	Grade Level 3 Exper. (N= 79)	3 Control (N= 83)	4 Exper. (N= 76)	4 Control (N= 89)	5 Exper. (N= 77)	5 Control (N= 84)
Game	2	3	4	3	3	3
Record	3.5	1	3	1	4	2
Clothes	1	2	1	2	1	1
Candy	8	8	8	8	6	7
Crayons and coloring book	6	6	6	6	8	6
Toy	5	5	7	7	7	8
Book	3.5	4	2	4	2	4
Ship model or doll's dress	7	7	5	5	5	5

Our results clearly demonstrate that a program giving children an opportunity to read, discuss, and take home a book every week, and to choose four gift books a year, has considerably and positively affected their attitudes toward reading and owning books.

While the program is intended primarily for children from non-reading backgrounds, it is conceivable that the program could be used effectively in other types of ecologies using non-professional personnel such as teacher-aides, or parent and student volunteers. This would enable the classroom teacher to have released time to do that part of the teaching job that does require professional training. One of the problems in using college-educated mothers as teacher-aides in the classroom has been in limiting their duties to simple clerical detail or to supervision of study periods. These activities do not permit aides the more satisfying experience of working directly with children. Consequently, their involvement with the education of individual children and with the total school program is hindered. The lack of teaching materials that can be handled by persons who have not received professional teacher training is to some extent accountable for this problem. For this reason, other reasons given previously, and the positive results of our research, we believe the establishment of a Books Exposure Program, which could be handled by non-professional personnel, would be a valuable undertaking for many school systems that need programs that will motivate children to read.